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ABSTRACT

A study assessed impacts on 58 schools and 286 On-Site Visitation team members of participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation during 1978-80. Quantitative data were collected through 402 questionnaires; 116 were sent to Local Vocational Education Coordinators (LVECs), and 286 to On-Site team members. Qualitative data were collected through 8-10 interviews conducted at each of six secondary schools. Findings showed that participation of schools in an evaluation changed the vocational education program of 70% of the 58 schools involved. Serving on an On-Site Team Evaluation changed the way in which 73% of the vocational educators did their work. The manner in which schools utilized evaluation findings influenced evaluation effectiveness. Impacts came from two forms of utilization--decision-making and discussion. Ten specific impact areas were studied: changing role of the LVEC, increased vocational staff commitment, employer/advisory committee member participation, articulation, guidance, adding/discontinuing capstone programs, special needs, adding equipment, role stereotyping, and placement services. Impact on Team Members and how they did their work as vocational educators was studied by judging the two forms of utilization of on-site evaluation experience. Four specific impact areas were studied: spin-off to home program, reciprocity between schools, state-wide articulation in vocational education, and financial considerations. (YLB)

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Impacts on Schools and Team Members of Participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation During 1978-80

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This study assessed the impacts on 58 schools and 286 On-Site Visitation team members of participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation during three years, 1978-80. Findings of the study showed that participation of schools in an evaluation changed the vocational education program of most schools. Serving on an On-Site Evaluation changed the way in which most vocational educators did their work.

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Abstract

This study assessed the impacts on 58 schools and 286 On-Site Visitation team members of participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation during three years, 1978-80. To accomplish this, a methodological mix was chosen, so that impacts could be documented quantitatively through questionnaire data and qualitatively through case studies. Quantitative data were collected through 402 questionnaires; 116 were sent to Local Vocational Education Coordinators (LVECs), and 286 were sent to On-Site team members. Qualitative data were collected through 8-10 interviews conducted at each of six secondary schools, chosen by geographic location and size of school. Findings of the study showed that participation of schools in an evaluation changed the vocational education program of 70% of the 58 schools involved. Serving on an On-Site Team Evaluation changed the way in which 73% of the vocational educators did their work after serving as on-site evaluators. The study also showed that for most effect, evaluation findings must be discussed and acted upon within three months in a specially called, structured meeting with the LVEC, district administrator, principal, and vocational staff participating.

Impacts on Schools and Team Members of Participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation During 1978-80

After the evaluation data are collected, analyzed and reported; after the evaluators have gone home, then what? What happens to the results and outcomes of that evaluation? Is it possible to show that the evaluation had an impact on that program or school?

This study assessed the impacts on 58 schools and 286 On-Site Visitation team members of participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation during three years, 1978-80. Vocational educators working closely with the Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation Project over the last three years have frequently observed impacts on schools and on-site visitation team members that were not stated as part of the formal goals and objectives of the project. The frequency of such observations led the author to attempt to document unspecified impacts, as well as changes linked to the specified purpose of the evaluation. In order to understand the significance of the results of participation in an evaluation, however, it is necessary to look briefly at the stated goals and objectives.

Background of the Study

The vocational program evaluation process and instrumentation was designed to provide outcome data for three administrative levels of vocational education: (a) to assist in program improvement at the local level, (b) to provide data for statewide planning by the Department of Public Instruction, and (c) to ensure accountability of federal and state funds and satisfy the federal mandate of evaluation within a five-year cycle.

Broadly stated, the three major goals of the evaluation project are stated below:

Major Goal One: to determine the effectiveness of the management of the comprehensive vocational education program. (The comprehensive program includes senior occupational preparation courses, sequence and exploratory levels).

Major Goal Two: to determine the effectiveness of the occupational preparation courses in the various vocational education disciplines: agriculture, business education, marketing and distributive education, health occupations, home economics, and industrial education.

Major Goal Three: to determine the effectiveness of the sequence and exploratory levels.

As additional background information for understanding the impacts of participation in an evaluation, it is useful to be aware of the three phases of the evaluation.

Phase I. SELF EVALUATION. Evaluation data are collected from staff and administration, occupational preparation and sequence vocational graduates of one and three years, employers of occupational preparation and sequence graduates, advisory committee members, current students, and special needs staff. A Self Evaluation Report is prepared by the school at the end of this phase.

Phase II. EXTERNAL EVALUATION. A visitation team composed of a team leader and four to ten team members spend 2½ days analyzing the Self Evaluation Report, interviewing program staff, and studying on-site documents. Evaluation assignments include the five management areas outlined in Major

Goal One, the six discipline areas outlined in Major Goal Two and services to special needs students. Each evaluator writes a report which is compiled into an On-Site Team Visitation Report.

Phase III. IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION FINDINGS. Using findings from the Self Evaluation and On-Site Team Visitation Reports, the local school develops short and long-range plans for program improvement. Implementation of these plans is begun. (Dale, 1980a, 1980b)

The study of impacts which occurred as a result of participating in a vocational evaluation is an outgrowth of the implementation phase. Schools utilized evaluation findings from Phases I and II to make decisions about program improvements and to fulfill state and federal regulations for funding. Schools and team members also utilized findings in unexpected ways that ranged farther than direct program decisions. It is the investigation of these specified and unspecified impacts that forms the basis of this study.

Related Literature

A review of evaluation literature shows many examples of the lack of use of evaluation findings. Reports of ignored or disregarded evaluations contribute to an overall sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of usefulness and impact of evaluations.

"Evaluation is one of the most widely discussed but little used processes in today's educational systems" (Worthen and Sanders, 1973). Alkin, et al (1979) talk of a consensus of the literature that there has been little impact of evaluation research on program decision-making.

A study by Alkin (1979) of the impact of evaluation on decision-making

in forty-two Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title VII programs tried to relate characteristics of the evaluation to reported evaluation impact. "At the federal level we found no evidence that evaluations were in fact used for summative decisions."

In most literature, utilization of evaluation is defined as occurring "when there is an immediate, concrete, and observable effect on specific decisions and program activities resulting directly from evaluation research findings" (Patton, 1978). Weiss (1972) concurs: "Evaluation research is meant for immediate and direct use in improving the quality of social programming." She goes on to state that "a review of evaluation experience suggests that evaluation results have generally not exerted significant influence on program decisions."

With such agreement in the literature that evaluation studies are not used in decision-making, the question arises: How do you recognize the presence or absence of utilization? Patton (1975) conducted follow-up studies on 20 federal health evaluations. He attempted to assess the degree to which these evaluations had been used, and to identify factors that affected varying degrees of utilization. He talked directly to users of the evaluation research. Findings showed that 78 percent of responding decision-makers felt the evaluation had an impact on the program; 80 percent felt the evaluation had nonprogram impacts.

The difference between this positive example of the use of evaluation data and the many examples in evaluation literature of the lack of such use lies in the definition of utilization. When evaluation data are used in decision-making, results are observable in immediate, direct, and concrete programmatic changes. Evaluation data may also be used in an informal way, emphasizing the interaction of people and situations in an

evaluation process. This interaction, or discussion, view of utilization defines impact more in terms that are meaningful to the participants of the evaluation, and less in terms of rapid, decisive, direction-changing decisions.

Method

In selecting a method to identify impacts on schools and team members of participating in a Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation, a strategy was needed which would identify utilization in various impact areas. To accomplish this, a methodological mix was chosen, so that impacts could be documented quantitatively through questionnaire data, and qualitively through case studies.

Quantitative data were collected through 402 questionnaires: 116 questionnaires were received from Local Vocational Education Coordinators (LVECs) and 286 were received from On-Site team members. Evaluation participants were surveyed on 14 impact areas. Two kinds of utilization were identified, decision-making and discussion; respondents rated the degree of impact from both kinds of utilization. Questions were asked about the people involved in making the change (impact), the situation in which decisions for change took place (informal to formal), and when the impact occurred.

Qualitative data were collected through 8-10 interviews conducted at each of 6 secondary schools, chosen by geographic location and size of school. Utilization of findings and impacts were then described in six case studies, highlighting multiple points of view involved in decision-making and discussion. A draft copy of the appropriate case study was sent to each LVEC. His reaction is included with each case study, constituting a field validation of the draft. A content analysis was then performed for

each case study; impacts were described in a holistic approach.

Findings of the study showed that participation of schools in a secondary vocational education program evaluation during three years, 1978-80, changed the vocational programs of most of the 58 schools involved. In addition, serving on an On-Site Team Evaluation changed the way in which most vocational educators did their work after serving as on-site evaluators. This study shows that, for most effect, evaluation findings must be discussed and acted upon within three months in a specially called, structured meeting with the LVEC, district administrator, principal, and vocational staff participating. Impact was not automatic. When the evaluation made a difference, the personal factor was evident: Some person or persons took the initiative to utilize the findings. Impact on team members depended upon their taking initiative also.

Conclusions About Schools

Utilization of Evaluation Findings

The manner in which each school utilized evaluation findings influenced the effectiveness of the evaluation. Phases in the utilization process included dissemination of findings, consideration of recommendations and setting priorities.

In each utilization phase, four groups of people were most likely to take the initiative to carry it out: the LVEC, district administrator, principal and vocational staff. (School board members, advisory committee members, special needs staff, and guidance staff were less involved in the utilization process.)

Impacts came from two forms of utilization: decision-making and discussion. In most cases impact resulted from decision-making, however in 3 out of 10 impact areas, change occurred in the form of increased

communication and discussion about the quality of vocational programming. (a) Areas in which change resulted more often from decision-making included increased vocational staff commitment, articulation, vocational guidance, efforts to reduce role stereotyping, services to special needs students, adding equipment, and improved advisory committee participation. (b) Areas in which change resulted more often from discussion included changing the role of the LVEC, adding/discontinuing capstone programs, and improving placement services.

The nature of the impact areas influenced the relationship between the impact value and the amount of utilization. For example: (a) Impact areas which require fiscal and staff decisions (adding/discontinuing capstone programs, changing the role of the LVEC, services to special needs students, and adding equipment) were judged to have high impact value even though they had low utilization. (b) Impact areas which do not require fiscal and staff decisions (improved vocational staff commitment, articulation, vocational guidance, and advisory committee participation) had high utilization, but were judged to have low impact.

Another way that utilization of evaluation findings influenced changes in vocational programming was through the interaction between people, situations, and time:

1. There was a difference in the people involved between impact areas requiring fiscal/staff decisions and areas not requiring fiscal/staff decisions. The LVEC showed consistent high involvement in all impact areas. The district administrator and school board members made decisions about some impact areas, but did not participate in discussions. The principal and vocational staff showed parallel involvement: in some areas both participated more in discussion about vocational programming.

2. In 7 out of 10 areas, impact happened in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda. Impact happened in the remaining three areas in regularly scheduled meetings with no structured agenda, such as advisory committee or vocational department meetings.

3. Change took place within three months in six of the ten areas, and in 3-6 months in another three areas.

Impacts

Utilization of evaluation findings must happen first in order for change to take place. As the utilization process continues, general and specific changes occur. This study showed that the overall evaluation had moderate to high impact in over two-thirds of the schools. Of the two phases, the On-Site Visitation was judged to have more impact than the Self Evaluation. Respondents also judged that the evaluation cycle was important and should be continued. Ten specific impact areas were studied; conclusions about these areas are presented below.

Changing the Role of the LVEC. The evaluation stimulated a lot of discussion about the LVEC's role, but few changes were made. When there was an impact, the district administrator and school board were most involved in the decisions, surprisingly in unstructured meetings. This suggests that decisions about the role of the LVEC were usually made in an informal setting; considerations were seldom placed on a formal agenda. These decisions were primarily made 3-6 months after the evaluation.

Increased vocational staff commitment. A major utilization of findings in this area is documented, especially in the decision-making form of utilization, with impact judged moderate to considerable. This utilization is all the more noteworthy because staff commitment is essential

in bringing about the most important specified outcome of the evaluation program, improvement at the local level. The LVEC and vocational staff worked together to produce this change, with the principal assisting much of the time. These people met in called or special meetings with a structured agenda. Changes took place right away, within 3 months.

Employer/advisory committee member participation. A significant number of schools utilized findings in encouraging community participation in vocational programming. While more schools preferred the decision-making form of utilization over discussion, the difference was not large. When utilization led to decisions, impact was moderate; when findings were only discussed, the impact was judged of less value. The LVEC, vocational staff and advisory committee members worked closely together, in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda. Changes took a little longer to effect, in 3-6 months.

Articulation. Utilization of findings in this area was high, particularly in decision-making. Interestingly, impact value was judged to be moderate in both discussion and decision-making forms of utilization. The LVEC, vocational staff and principal collaborated to produce this change, with a significant input from advisory committee members. Changes occurred in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda, within three months.

Guidance. Impact value was judged moderate to considerable in decision-based utilization and of less value when findings were only discussed. Utilization was high, however, especially in decision-making. The LVEC and guidance staff were most involved in changes, with the principal and district administrator also contributing. It is interesting to note that vocational staff had low input into vocational guidance

programming. Changes occurred in regularly scheduled meetings, such as advisory committee or vocational department meetings, with an informal or unstructured format. Changes took place within three months. Further attention is drawn to the fact that the situation for change was different from that of other impact areas. In most cases no special meetings were called to address the implications of evaluation findings on the guidance program. Case study respondents described the potential for the evaluation to change some counselors' viewpoints to include more emphasis on vocational guidance services.

Adding/discontinuing capstone programs. Impact from the evaluation on capstone programs was infrequent, but important when it did occur. Utilization of evaluation findings in decision-making was the lowest of all 10 impact areas, yet impact value was judged the highest (considerable). Utilization of findings in discussion was higher than any other area (except changing the role of the LVEC), yet impact from discussion was low. This suggests that while the evaluation has potential for major impact on capstone programming, decisions are difficult to make. The LVEC and vocational staff were most involved in these decisions, with the district administrator and principal also contributing. Changes occurred in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda. Decisions in this impact took longer to make (1-2 years), possibly caused by fiscal and curriculum considerations connected with capstone programs.

Special Needs. Impact through decision-making was important; however, utilization was moderate. Discussion of findings produced both low utilization and low impact value. When decisions were made, the LVEC and special needs staff were involved; the principal and vocational staff also contributed. Guidance staff were seen to be involved only half of

of the time. Changes occurred in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda. Action was taken within three months.

Adding Equipment. In making decisions about equipment, utilization of evaluation findings was low, but impact value was judged moderate to considerable. Discussion-based utilization was less frequent and was judged of little importance. The LVEC, vocational staff and district administrator were most involved, with a significant contribution in decision-making by advisory committee members. Changes occurred in a called or special meeting with a structured agenda, within three months. While questionnaire data show low utilization of evaluation findings in decisions to purchase equipment, three of the six case studies indicate major expenditures made as a result of evaluation recommendations.

Role Stereotyping. When evaluation findings were utilized in making decisions, the impact value was important; however, utilization was only moderate. Discussion about findings happened infrequently and produced low impact. Case study data (as noted below) illuminate the frustrations and resistance that accompany any change made in this area. The LVEC worked closely with the vocational staff, guidance staff and principal in effecting change. Participation of guidance staff is particularly noteworthy here, showing more involvement than in any other impact area, except in guidance services. Changes took place in regularly scheduled, but unstructured meetings; such as, advisory committee or vocational department meetings, or faculty inservice. Impact in this area happened most often in 1-2 years, further suggesting that decisions in this area are not quick and easy.

Placement Services. Utilization of evaluation findings in this area was lowest in both decision-making and discussion. However, in those cases where decisions were made, impact was important. Low impact in this area contrasts sharply with data from the Third Annual Composite Report, 1979-80, which shows high employment rates for capstone and vocational graduates. It may be that placement of graduates is functioning so well already, that necessary improvement was small. When changes did occur, the LVEC, vocational staff, guidance staff, and interestingly, the district administrator were most involved. Decisions happened in structured meetings, both on a called or special basis and those that were regularly scheduled. Changes happened within three months.

Conclusions About Team Members

Utilzation of On-Site Evaluation Experience

An unspecified outcome of the evaluation was the impact on Team Members and how they did their work as vocational educators. The catalyst in the On-Site experience was the interaction between the Team Member and the persons he/she interviewed. Working with other team members contributed significantly to the experience, particularly as the team came to consensus. At the end of the On-Site Visit, team members organized and communicated their conclusions, recommendations, and suggested solutions via a written report. Team members came from diverse vocational education positions: local vocational staff, LVECs, administration, VTAE staff, university faculty, and DPI consultants.

Two forms of utilization were studied: decision-making and discussion. There was no apparent preference of decision-making, implying that the nature of impact on team members came as much through discussion as through decision-making. The impact value was judged slightly higher when decisions

were made, as was the case in utilization of findings by schools.

Another way that utilization of the On-Site experience influenced change in the Team Member's professional work was through the interaction between people, situations and time.

1. Team members initiated change; they also motivated others to take action. Four people were consistently involved: the LVEC, vocational staff, principal and district administrator. In addition, advisory committee members participated in spin-offs to home programs and DPI consultants participated in statewide articulation.

2. In three of four impact areas, change occurred in an unscheduled, unstructured setting, such as a coffee break or spontaneous contact in an office or lounge. Impact on financial considerations occurred with equal frequency in informal or formal settings.

3. Change happened within three months in three of the four impact areas. Impact on financial considerations took longer: six months to one year. This is consistent with the fact that budget decisions were made annually.

Impacts

The impact on the professional growth of team members was outstanding. Over 90 percent of the 286 respondents said the On-Site Visitation functioned as an inservice training session. Not only did they learn from the experience, but also nearly three-quarters of the respondents said they changed their practices as vocational educators. Developing a network of personal contacts in vocational education was also viewed as an important impact of serving on an On-Site Visitation. Four specific impact areas were studied; conclusions about these areas are presented below.

Spin-off to home program. Utilization was highest of the four impact areas showing decision-making and discussion as approximately equal.

Impact value was judged to be moderate for both forms of utilization. One hundred eighty-three vocational educators used the evaluation experience to improve their home programs. The vocational staff and LVEC were most involved in this change with additional input from advisory committee members, the principal and district administrator. Changes occurred in casual, spontaneous situations, within three months.

Reciprocity between schools. Impact occurred slightly more often through decision-making than through discussion, with moderate impact value. Overall, 122 team members saw changes taking place in reciprocity as a result of the evaluation. The LVEC and district administrator were most involved, with additional input from the principal and vocational staff. Changes occurred in casual, spontaneous situations, within three months.

State-wide articulation in vocational education. Ninety-five vocational education leaders of the state viewed serving on an On-Site Team Visitation as having an impact on facilitating and developing state-wide articulation in vocational education. Changes occurred in decision-making slightly more often than in discussion. Impact value was judged moderate. The LVEC and vocational staff worked together in making changes with additional involvement from the principal, district administrator, and DPI consultants. Change occurred in casual, spontaneous situations, within three months.

Financial considerations. Utilization was lowest of all four areas in financial matters (change in personnel, equipment or program). In those cases where there was utilization, however, impact value was judged moderate. The district administrator, vocational staff and principal were most involved in decisions for change, with additional input from the

LVEC. Changes took place with equal frequency in informal and formal settings, in 6 months to one year.

Implications

Program evaluation made a difference. The conclusions of this study show that impacts from evaluation of vocational education can be measured. These measurements indicate improvement is being accomplished in vocational education throughout the state; and vocational educators have changed positively because of their evaluation experience. Several implications are inferred, at local, state and national levels in accordance with the outcome measures specified in the Wisconsin Secondary Vocational Education Evaluation Project. (Dale, 1980a, 1980b)

Local

1. Specific plans for the implementation process should be made before the arrival of the On-Site Team, so that momentum generated by the evaluation will not be lost. Since most impact happened within three months, it is important to address findings as soon as possible after the conclusion of the On-Site Visit. For maximum benefit, special meetings should be called to consider recommendations, involving especially the LVEC, district administrator, principal and vocational staff. Advisory committee members, guidance staff, special needs staff and school board members should be involved where appropriate.

2. When the evaluation was effective, the impact could be traced to the commitment and enthusiasm of people. Usually the LVEC initiated and coordinated utilizaton. It should be noted that the current trend for schools to drop the services of an LVEC requires a directive on the part of the local administrator to specify who will coordinate the utilization process.

3. Team members overwhelmingly agreed that serving on an On-Site Team enhanced their professional growth and changed their practices as vocational educators. Local administrators should actively seek evaluation experiences for their vocational education staff as professional growth opportunities.

State

1. The commonality of evaluation experiences produced professional interaction throughout the state. Since there was a mix of people involved in all phases of the evaluation (local staff and administration, VTAE staff, university faculty and DPI consultants) articulation was facilitated. A state level effort is needed to communicate how evaluation findings were utilized, so that periodic articulation is further stimulated. For example: an implementation package could be developed using results from this study to be sent to schools before their On-Site Visitation. Another example would be a statewide newsletter highlighting cases of successful utilization.

2. This study shows that statewide evaluation of vocational education does produce impact on local programs and people. Therefore, statewide evaluation should continue to be an integral part of the state's vocational education program.

National

1. The depth and multiplicity of impacts identified in this statewide study show that changes from evaluation of vocational education are measurable and positive. Therefore, this study can be used to justify expenditures in evaluative research of vocational education at the national level. Impact studies show the effectiveness of program evaluation similar to the way in which outcome studies justify expenditures at the

local level. Other states may conduct similar impact studies of vocational program evaluation to justify their evaluation expenditures.

2. The major thrust of this study has been the identification of impacts from the grass roots. If other states produced similar data, regional and national level conclusions could be drawn about the effectiveness of program evaluation in vocational education. National data would carry more impact if it included microstudies (local involvement in collection and interpretation) thus avoiding the irrelevancy of a system where accountability questions are generated at the macro level. Surveys producing national averages give meaningless and inaccurately negative generalizations. To produce valid national data, micro studies from all sections of the nation should be assembled. This is not currently accomplished by national level personnel making on-site spot checks of vocational education.

3. Data from The Third Annual Composite Evaluation Report have been used by the American Vocational Association in testimony before Congress. Since this study shows that the Wisconsin evaluation model has measurable impact in over two-thirds of the schools evaluated, AVA should use conclusions from this study as additional testimony in reauthorization hearings.

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